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Inman Calls U.S. Intelligence 'Marginally Capable'

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SAN FRANCISCO, April 27 — United States foreign intelligence is "marginally capable" of meeting "the problems we are going to face in the 1980's and 1990's," Adm. Bobby R. Inman said in a speech here today at the American Newspaper Publishers Association convention.

It was Admiral Inman's first public address since he announced his intention to resign, effective July 1, as Deputy Director of Central Intelligence.

He said he believed the United States

"intelligence community" was fully capable as to the military plans of the Soviet Union. His concern, he said, is with keeping track of the Soviet Union's "great difficulties in competition for raw materials, natural resources, markets, dealing with instability in many areas of the world, trying to cope with the fervor of religious movements."

"I simply reject out of hand the likelihood that we could be surprised with a Pearl Harbor kind of attack," he said. "And the same pretty well holds true for the eastern front, central part of Europe," he said, except in cases of prolonged bad weather, which might hinder intelligence gathering.

In response to a question after his speech outside the meeting hall, Admiral Inman said lack of United States foreknowledge of the Argentine Government's intention to invade the Falkland Islands was illustrative of the shortcomings he ascribed to inadequate staffing.

He said that while United States intelligence was well equipped for surveillance of the Soviet Union and was adequate in assessing foreign military equipment and manpower, he believed it did "not so well" in following political and economic trends abroad and did "very poorly" in maintaining an encyclopedic knowledge of the world.

Admiral Inman called for competitive intelligence analysis, with at least two departments offering separate readings, to improve assessment of the "mosaic of tiny pieces" of information fed into the intelligence agencies.

Admiral Inman, who is 51 years old, again denied that his resignation was prompted by difficulties with William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence. He said he was leaving because "there is a limit on how far you can go," continuing, "The Director of the C.I.A. is always going to be someone with political views like the President's, and this is how it should be."

"There were no policy disputes on any major issues that caused me to re-

sign," he said. He described his working relationships with Mr. Casey as very good and said he felt that his own blunt personality and urgency in discussing problems sharply had been met with understanding.

"I could not ask for better support," he said.

He told several hundred publishers at the Fairmont Hotel that the problems of United States intelligence stemmed from two factors.

First, he said, the intelligence establishment was cut back sharply in the 1960's and 1970's after a major buildup in the 1950's, losing 40 percent of its personnel from 1964 to the mid-1970's.

He said emphasis had been placed on such intelligence assets as satellite surveillance systems, in the name of cost efficiency, at the expense of personnel.

Secondly, he said he was concerned with damage to intelligence gathering by publication of details that revealed sources and methods. He told the publishers he disagreed with their opposition to proposed amendments to Federal law that would exempt C.I.A. papers from Freedom of Information Act disclosure requirements.

However, Admiral Inman spoke favorably of a compromise proposal by Senator John H. Chafee, Republican of Rhode Island, that would require the agency to show that disclosure would be damaging to national security before it could withhold requested papers.

Admiral Inman said creation of the intelligence oversight committees in the House and Senate had led to greater understanding of intelligence needs.